



# **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

Wildlife Bureau  
PO Box 200701  
Helena MT 59020-0701  
October 8, 2010

Dear Interested Person:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is requesting public comment on the Bitterroot Wolf 10j proposal in deer/elk Hunting District (HD) 250. This proposal seeks to secure authority from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to take wolves in HD 250. Proposed specifics, comment process and comment deadline are all listed below. Any final adoption by the FWP Commission on November 18 will be forwarded to the USFWS for consideration to approve at that required Federal level.

## **BITTERROOT WOLF 10j PROPOSAL**

The specifics below represent fundamental components of the Bitterroot Wolf 10j proposal.

### **PROPOSED WOLF TAKE**

- Reduce wolf numbers in HD 250 (West Fork of Bitterroot) from the minimum of 24 counted in December 2009 to a year-end minimum of 12 wolves represented by 2 – 3 packs from 2010 through 2015; objective = 12 wolves in 2-3 packs in HD 250
- Fall 2010/Winter 2011 season to start with USFWS approval not before Dec 15, 2010 and running until quota is met not later than Feb 28, 2011; 100 “Agents of the State” drawn from pool of applicants; not more than 10% nonresident; hunting only from one half hour before sunrise to one half hour after sunset; no baiting or electronic calling/amplification; 12 hour reporting with 48-hour check-in; license required to keep pelt and skull
- 5-year proposal to USFWS with annual FWP Commission process and rules; proposed management options available for annual definitions by FWP Commission include fair chase hunting or trapping by the public, control actions by agency personnel or designees, or any combination approved by the Commission

### **JUSTIFICATION/HISTORY**

- Wolf predation is a major cause of mortality preventing the elk population from reaching management objectives in HD 250
- Elk Plan Objective of 1,600 – 2,400 observed elk, with at least 10 bulls per 100 cows observed during aerial surveys
- A ratio of 25 calves per 100 cows is recognized in the Plan as a minimum standard for recruitment in the West Fork to maintain a stable elk population.
- Elk numbers and particularly calf recruitment have declined as wolf numbers increased
- Wolves first established in the West Fork in 2001 (Painted Rocks pack) with three other packs documented in 2005, 2007 and 2008 and the population has shown continuous growth

- Average of 15 calves per 100 cows in 2007-2010 (40% below the statewide Elk Management Plan standard of 25); calf:cow ratios of 9-11 in 2009-2010 (56-64% below the same standard)
- 2008-2010 elk counts of 744-863 (46-54% below the minimum population objective of 1,600 elk)
- Human, lion, and black bear predation have not significantly increased
- History of hunter harvest includes periods of prescribed population growth and/or reduction associated with expected population response; most recently MFWP has significantly reduced antlerless harvest rates by hunters with expected population growth response not detected
- Most recently lion harvest quotas have increased and additional harvest method/time (archery only) added to fall black bear season
- No major change to habitat
- Proposed 10(j) action focuses on the wolf component which represents the major factor not currently addressed in attempting to restore elk recruitment (calf:cow ratios) to objective levels.

### **MONITORING**

- Wolf and elk populations will be monitored annually
- Wolf - measured by a December-January enumeration of packs and wolf numbers per pack
- Elk - total population size and calf recruitment rate

### **COMMENT PROCESS AND DEADLINE**

For further clarification, you may call the Wildlife Bureau office at 406-444-2612. The complete Bitterroot Wolf 10j proposal is available on the FWP website (see link below). To submit comments electronically, this letter with the imbedded links below and the complete 10j proposal can be found under “Opportunity for Public Comment” on the Hunting home page at the fwp.mt.gov website. Written comments can be sent to: FWP – Wildlife Bureau, Attn: Public Comment, POB 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701. The deadline for public comment on the Bitterroot Wolf 10j Proposal is 5 PM, Wednesday, November 10, 2010. Any Final adoptions on the Bitterroot Wolf 10J proposal is scheduled to take place at the November 18, 2010 FWP Commission meeting in Helena. At that point, any final adoption will be forwarded to the USFWS for consideration to approve at that required Federal level.

### **BITTERROOT WOLF 10j PROPOSAL:**

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/D3ZL3GL>